

Teaching English Academic Writing in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract—The article deals with the issues of academic writing teaching and learning in tertiary school in the context of the Russian educational system challenging integration into a global educational environment. On the one hand, a successful inclusion of our professionals into the global scientific and technical community demands creating numerous publications accompanied with a rather high rating of citation, on the other hand, the existing educational programs' format and their content rather prevent than support the achievement of the goal of a qualified teaching in academic writing. The author of the article presents the analysis of the works, articles, have been written by Russian and foreign researchers; evaluation of the best resources created by the world best universities with the help of ICT.

Keywords—academic writing, scientific article, language skills, online resources, ICT, methods of teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Appealing to the successful foreign experience, Ya. V. Rozanova, from Tomsk Polytechnic University emphasizes that many universities abroad work hard on the students' academic literacy increase delivering special academic writing courses. [1]

The researchers from the Higher School of Economics point out that quite often students do not possess an appropriate command of necessary patterns, formats and means even in their native language to adequately express their ideas. Unfortunately, a rather big amount of students use plagiarism to fulfill the assignments prescribed by the university program which, evidently, takes place due to the absence of working skills with written utterances and well developed skills of productive reading helping to structure text. [2]

I.B. Korotkina draws attention to the insufficient writing skills development not only among university students but also among their teachers. The author highlights the crucial importance to possess an academic literacy as a complex of skills connected with information flows' processing, their critical and analytical evaluation. The information field in the modern society is being continually enlarged, becoming more saturated and complicated. Written communication forms start prevailing, due to swift integration of the various fields of knowledge and interpenetration of cultures. All the aforementioned processes influence greatly on the functioning of educational system. [3]

The educational system in the Russian Federation still lags behind the advanced world standards. The cause is rooted in the autocracy, which has still been preserved in many educational institutions in spite of their newly proclaimed up-to-date profiles. The lack of interdisciplinary connections, disability and, to some extent, fear to express one's own ideas have turned out to be the effect of the traditional emphasis on memorizing and learning without an adequate comprehension.

I.B. Korotkina and other Moscow authors point out the difference in the interpretation of the term "academic writing" in Russian and traditional European and American approaches. In Western approach, "academic writing" is interpreted rather broadly, engaging various skills, starting with a simple school essay writing, and further embracing independent research results description at a higher school. Modern professional educational system should not only teach a student how to adapt actively in the modern society, moreover, it has to support the formation of the type of intelligence, thinking, relationship with the reality of constant changes in a professional and outside environment. Thus, it is possible to speak about the creation of a cognitive aptitude system close to the researcher intelligence. [4, 5]

The afore mentioned authors draw attention to an urgent necessity to revise the content of higher school educational programs, methods of teaching, educators' training according to the up-to-date requirements of science and technology. The authors insist on the reduction of traditional lecture hours in favor of module approach, promotion of active, productive, independent student learning. It means that Master of Science course takers and postgraduate university students have to learn to formulate their Research Proposal clearly, neatly, in detail both in Russian and in English.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The given article presents a comparative analysis of recently issued publications by Russian, British and American educators devoted to academic writing in tertiary school. The author appeals also to the survey carried out among the Master of Science Program takers at Novosibirsk State Technical University in spring 2017. The results of the questionnaire reveal students' educational interests, while learning English, presenting also their attitude to academic writing study.

III. NEW APPROACHES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

A. *Coursebooks of new generation*

The authors of the recent generation coursebooks have already taken into account the drawbacks of the old educational programs having developed modern courses to form receptive and productive language skills. Several years ago there was launched a coursebook “English for academics”, written by the best Russian university teachers in cooperation with the British Council. The coursebook is comprised of two parts; both of them have a rather convenient module structure. [6]

Module structure gives an opportunity for teachers and students to independently combine assignments from the different parts of the coursebook in connection with their specific needs. Having a look at the module “Writing” one will be able to get acquainted with a structure of formal and informal messages, presented both in a paper and electronic formats. In addition, students and teachers have a chance to discuss very important issues of politeness conventions, intercultural communication and the author’s responsibility for clear and neat presentation of the ideas in the text before their potential readers.

Further students can learn how to write a cover letter, a proposal for a partnership or a grant proposal. All the tasks proved to be of a practical value giving the opportunity to practice in presentation of information in a clear, logical and consecutive way. The ability to write an abstract for one’s own research article or thesis has become rather relevant. The report verbs knowledge is the basis for a trend description development as well as the appropriate use of various numbers, scale and measurement units of distance, weight, volume, temperature, current intensity, voltage, etc.

B. *ICT application in the successful provision of educational programs*

It is rather important to emphasize the growing importance of ICT application in the successful provision of educational programs. Computers and digital technologies contribute a lot into independent promotion in any chosen sphere of knowledge along with English academic writing. Leading national and foreign universities have developed a lot of online resources which can contribute a lot to learning and teaching English academic writing. Among Russian universities, first of all, it is necessary to mention the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and its online Academic Writing Centre giving the opportunity to use lectures, textbooks and other useful resources on the Internet. [7]

The section “Useful resources” on the site of HSE online Academic Writing Centre has been designed in a hypertext format, with a four-level structured hierarchy of available resources. What is of a paramount importance, the introduction to the course contains a number of psychological advices how to overcome anxiety or even fear preventing from a text creation. One of the key advices deals with the planning of a coming work on writing a text, reflection on its structure and content. The experts consider the content of the text to be more important at the introductory stage of writing, suggesting appealing to the form upgrading later at a more advanced stage

of work when the author will have already been absorbed with his/her work having overcome all psychological obstacles.

IV. FOUR LEVELS OF ACADEMIC WRITING POSSESSION

A. *The first level of academic writing possession*

The first level of academic writing mastering is the acquaintance with paragraph structural elements. The rule of thumb while creating a paragraph, which is a structural unit of any text, is the inclusion of no more than one key idea. The transition to a new key idea requires a development of a new paragraph. Each paragraph of the text should have a logically clear structure. The author has to use key words, parallel structures, coherent sentences, synonyms, pronouns, referring to certain nouns in preceding sentences. The authors recommend placing the key idea or thesis statement at the beginning of the paragraph so that a potential reader could immediately identify it and the author would have a good opportunity to provide further development of the key idea in the rest sentences of the paragraph. A better result can be achieved with the use of examples, statistics, and quotations from original source. The use of special linking words contributes into the building of utterance coherence.

Arguments, introduced in support of the key idea, should initiate a discussion of different points of view in order to provide a thorough analysis of each of them. There are four types of claims: 1) fact and determination, 2) cause and effect, 3) statement on value of something, 4) statement on an assumed decision or a system of events purposed to problem solution. The choice of the assumption depends on the author’s position, the audience s/he appeals to, and the nature of debates arising at the collision of different viewpoints.

B. *The second level of academic writing possession*

The second level of English academic writing mastering includes creating abstracts for conference theses, research articles, and conference presentations. The most popular are three formats of articles: APA Style, MLA Style, and Chicago Manual 17th Edition.

APA Style (American Psychological Association) Style is used for publishing articles in Social Sciences. MLA (Modern Language Association) Style is used to issue works on Humanities and so called Liberal Arts rooted in ancient scientific tradition according to which liberal citizens used to be taught Rhetoric, Grammar, Mathematics, Astronomy. Nowadays Liberal Arts correspond first of all to independent individuality development, critical thinking, creative skills, problem solving ability and team working fitness. Chicago Manual Of Style (CMOS) was updated last time in 2017, thus its name “Chicago Manual 17th Edition” is connected with the number “17”. The style is used to prepare for publication a rather wide range of articles, especially the ones on history.

Mastering English academic writing skills at the second level means not just following certain lexical and grammar rules, but what is more, strict observance of ethic norms: the respect to intellectual property, obligatory reference to the author’s name while mentioning their works. Gender neutral style should be used while writing scientific texts. Sensitive

topics of religion, politics, and cultural values must be treated with a great respect and caution.

C. *The third level of academic writing possession*

The third level of English academic writing mastering gives a potential opportunity to publish an article in a reviewed scientific journal. The HSE Academic Writing Centre provides a rich data basis of various journals giving author of an article the opportunity to do their own choice.

The process of reviewing is presented in detail on the British site <https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/ethical-guidelines-for-peer-reviewers/> [8]. Hundreds of reviewed scientific journals are presented on the site of Cambridge Publishing House <https://www.cambridge.org/core/what-we-publish/journals> [9]. On the HSE Writing Centre site there are materials on the published issues' rating, moreover, the advices are given how to provide an appropriate format for the article sent for publication. The most popular recommendation in case if the editorship refused to publish an article suggests a further editing of the article according to the presented requirements and afterwards forwarding it to another journal for publishing. A special website of Harvard University offers useful information about a correct usage of its 70 libraries' online resources. The instruction on the site underlines the importance of cited resource integration into the text of the author's work, accompanying it with a special clarification to provide for the reader a detailed explanation of the necessity to use the resource. The accent is put on the efficiency of the online resources' application as well as on the escape of plagiarism in one's article: <https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/nuts-bolts-integrating> [10].

Yale University course on academic writing proves to be fascinating and rather useful. Students are encouraged to undertake unknown gripping topics; peer and self assessment are very welcomed as well as further perfection of the text based on gotten advices. Students attend special practical classes to obtain skills for appropriate design of various cited resources <https://ctl.yale.edu/writing/undergraduate-writing/junior-and-senior-essays> [11].

D. *The fourth level of academic writing possession*

The fourth level of study at the English Academic Writing Centre at HSE has the goal to train the course takers for the speaking presentations on the basis of enthralling text, developed beforehand. The art of public speaking certainly requires development and training a number of additional skills connected with the attraction and keeping the audience attention for a rather long period of time. Definite rhetorical skills are supposed to be trained. Anyway, fundamentally and thoroughly beforehand created written text of a speaking presentation contributes a lot into a successful report delivery of even a non-professional speaker. The materials and instructions for a scientific presentation development are available on the site of Ohio University: <http://www.physics.ohio-state.edu/~wilkins/writing/Supp/dazzle.html> [12].

Among foreign universities of the English-speaking countries, it is worth mentioning the University of California in Irvine. The online courses on academic writing developed and

delivered by the trainers of this university give the opportunity to all motivated people in all countries around the world to study academic writing beginning with the basic level, and then gradually passing to the highest level of scientific articles writing [13]. The Online Writing Laboratory (OWL), launched by the University of Perdue, one of the oldest and the most prestigious universities in the USA, is famous all over the world for its theoretical materials giving the unlimited opportunities for independent learning and training in academic writing at any level of difficulty. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/writinglab/> [14].

V. ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING CENTERS IN RUSSIA

The review of recently issued publications in the journal "Higher Education in Russia" evidences of a growing popularity of English Academic Writing at a tertiary school. For example, in the mutual article by E.M. Bazanova and I.B. Korotkina the perspectives of the Russian Consortium of Academic Writing development are analyzed. The authors confess that among the declared 14 Academic Writing Centers in the Russian Federation, only 7 really work, they are located in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Samara. The key reasons of the current unsatisfactory situation with the Academic Writing Centers, according to E.M. Bazanova and I.B. Korotkina, are the lack of the experience, financing, qualified specialists and other objective obstacles arisen as a result of a rather long existence of a different paradigm of the Russian higher education development, preventing a wide spread of academic writing which was not considered to be of a primary importance [15].

A. *Challenges of the integral development of the English academic writing at Russian universities*

Other educators are similarly discussing challenges of the integral development of the English academic writing at Russian universities. For example, V.A. Dugartserenova, from the National Research University Higher School of Economics emphasizes in one of her works that the structure of academic process itself at the university she works for does not presupposes a wide opportunity of teaching and training to comprise scientific texts in English. The author highlights the necessity of skills development, which would give students the opportunity to create an authentic scientific text in English rather than the text's word for word translation from the Russian language into English [16].

B. *Linguistic peculiarities of English scientific text*

It is of a paramount importance to pay attention to the linguistic peculiarities of a scientific text introduced in the English language. According to the recent trends, foreign publishing houses, for instance, European Association of Scientific Editors, recommend to use structurally simple language for writing articles in English forwarded to international publishing houses. To put this recommendation into practice the authors are suggested avoiding verb forms in The Passive Voice, rather using The Active Voice as well as personal pronouns "I" and "we". Although, the situation is still ambiguous, and the authors of the article about the peculiarities of a scientific writing style of publications issued in English

advise to pay attention to British and American discourse difference and study in detail the requirements of the journal, one applies for a publication [17].

C. Methods of teaching English Academic Writing in Russia

E.S. Chuikova presents the analysis of different approaches while teaching English academic writing, emphasizing socio-cultural aspect which in its turn touches upon value oriented aspects of teaching. The arising of a motivation component serves as an indicator of a personality oriented approach influence on the content of education [18]. S.V. Bogolepova describes advantages and disadvantages of various approaches to teaching English academic writing. The author emphasizes that the “Controlled-to-free approach” gives the opportunity to sequentially practice text elements creation. Still, this approach does not provide the opportunities for creativity. As for the “Free-writing approach”, it, vice versa, provides a complete freedom for creativity, although, hardly is appropriate for teaching students with a low level of English. The author presents three more approaches in her article: Paragraph-pattern, Grammar-syntax-organization and a Process approach.

The author suggests using “Paragraph-pattern approach” to develop students’ language literacy. “Grammar-syntax-organization approach” also contributes a lot into the development of language literacy and, consequently, increases students’ motivation in learning English. “Process approach” is the most complicated and time consuming strategy; nevertheless, it can be successfully applied if communicative methods of teaching English are used [19].

D. Issues of teaching English to Master of Science Program takers

Taking into account objectively unfavorable reasons preventing from the delivery of qualitative classes on teaching English to Master of Science course takers, the author of the given article had developed and carried out the questionnaire on students’ satisfaction with the Master of Science program content. The survey was carried out with the assistance of the English language teachers of the Foreign Languages Department for Engineering Faculties at Novosibirsk State Technical University in spring of the year 2017. The carried out questionnaire contained thirteen multiple choice questions and one open question enquiring Master of Science Course takers suggestions on the English language course teaching improvements. According to the survey data, writing is not very popular among students. Answering the question on their preferences in learning English, students have put speaking skills in the first place. The answers can be presented in a pie chart.

It is obvious that the majority of students would like rather to develop their speaking skills which provide a remarkable opportunity to communicate with representatives of different cultures from nearly all countries over the world.

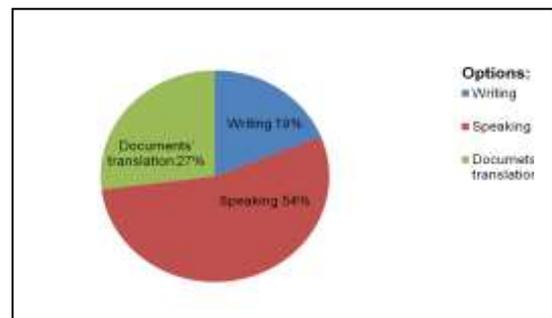


Fig.1. Master of Science Students’ preferences in learning English

Comparing the Master of Science Program modules, currently being delivered to students, the majority of respondents have chosen “Research”.

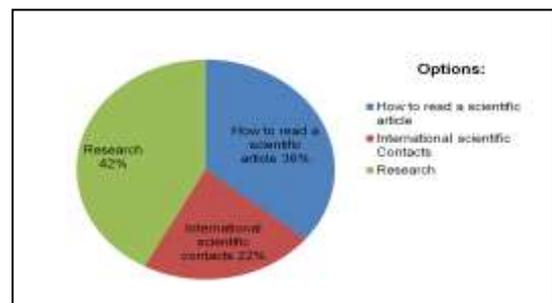


Fig.2. Master of Science Students’ evaluation of the three modules of the taken English language course

The results of the survey, presented in the second pie chart let us hope that there is a chance to restore the interest to English academic writing among students with a help of their fascination in research, which can hardly be imagined without writing research articles and publications in cited scientific journals.

Overall, the efficiency of educational process can be reached with the achievement of good results in case the teacher is able to combine different approaches of training in connection with students’ needs. Thus, higher educational institutions’ teachers dealing with English academic writing should use various approaches and methods to develop their unique individual pedagogic style providing the fulfillment of the set goals and achievement of desired results.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is necessary to put an accent on the phenomenon without which all available resources and presented approaches are useless. It is motivation of the educational process participants – students and teachers. It has been mentioned above about the imperfections of the current educational system. Modern information communication technologies or ICT give a unique opportunity to move forward independently on any conservative educational systems, improving language skills. Therefore, it is essential to confess the advantages of educational process participants who in addition to their computer literacy have a perfect command of

English and are able to use the learning resources of the best universities of the world.

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